

First Presbyterian Church
Springfield, Union County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Main Street and Springfield Avenue
Springfield, Union County
New Jersey

Owner: Presbyterian Church.

Date of Erection: 1791.

Architect: No record.

Builder: No record.

Present Condition:

Number of Stories: One, and balcony. Cupola.

Materials of Construction: Wood.

Other Existing Records: See text. ¹

Additional Data: See following page.

¹ Also see photograph in the American Architect Magazine,
March, 1936.

H.C.F.

DATA NOT COMPLETE AND NOT GUARANTEED
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Source of information - N.Y. Herald Tribune, Apr.10, 1932

Built in pre-Revolutionary days, the First Presbyterian Church at Springfield now finds itself in a modern environment with a church plant suitable for a hundred years ago. The church was in the thick of the Battle of Springfield in the Revolution. From it arose the saying, "Give 'em Watts", because hymn books were used for wadding in muskets and Isaac Watts, the world's most prolific hymn writer, had contributed most of the hymns in the books. This historic church was established in 1745.

Source of information - Newark Evening News, 1928

The first edifice was built of logs in 1745, at what is now Millburn, New Jersey. In the old burying-ground, now owned by the S.A.R., is a tomb-stone of William Stites, dated 1727. At that time the Briant family came here, and there were only three houses between Elizabeth and Morristown, but in 1738 Springfield alone had three houses. These belonged to the Denman, VanWinkle, and Whitehead families. Previous to the building of the church, the pioneers were accustomed to walk to Elizabeth to church. It was in 1746 that Rev. Timothy Sims became pastor, and it was in after years that his grandson, Captain Sims, created much excitement by a theory that the centre of the earth was inhabited and that people were to be reached from the pole. He petitioned Congress to fit out an expedition to ascertain the correctness of the statement, but Congress replied by saying that there were enough people living on the outside without hunting for more inside. In four years of this pastorate there was given to Mr. Sims and Peter Dickinson, their heirs and assigns, 100 acres to be held by them for use of the minister of the parish "for all time and never to be sold or disposed of for any other use, and in return a pint of spring water was to be given when demanded on the premises".

The second house of worship was built in 1761 on the site where the present church stands. It was this church which took such an important part in the Battle of Springfield. The houses in Springfield were burned at that time, as well as the church, by the British.

From W.W.J.

During the Revolution Mr. Van Arsdale was the pastor, and in that period the members passed through many trying experiences. The present structure was built on the site of the previous one and completed in 1791. The building is of handmade cypress shingles and hand-wrought nails and is at the corner of Morris Avenue and Main Street. It was built by members of the church, many of whom are buried in the old cemetery across the street. They cut the best timber from their farms and took it to town, and with their own hands fashioned and built the structure. The women took food from their homes and served it to the men during the building.

The bell in the steeple is made from one which was in the old church before the Revolution, and called the Jersey farmers to battle on June 23, 1780. It was cast in England in 1722. (S.A.Krom, 1900).

Source of information - History of Union County, 1923.

Organized out of a portion of the Connecticut Farms congregation and incorporated September 23, 1876.

The pastors and dates are as follows: -
Timothy Symmes, 1746-51; Nathan Kerr, 1763-65; Jacob Van Arsdale, 1774-1801; Gershon Williams, 1801-1818; James W. Tucker, 1818-1819; Elias W. Crane, 1820-26; John D. Paxton, 1826-27; Wm. Gray, 1828-29; Horace Doolittle, 1830-33; John C. Hart, 1835-43; Edward E. Rankin, 1844-50; Wm. E. Locke, 1851-52; Orlando L. Kirtland, 1853-72; Marcellus Bowen, 1872-74; Henry W. Teller, 1874-83; Geo. H. Stephens, 1883-86; Wm. Hop-
paugh, 1887-1913; Geo. A. Liggett, Ph. D., 1913

The church was remodeled and renovated previous to the celebration of the 125th anniversary in 1916. There are two cemeteries connected with it.

Source of information - Aymar Embury II, 1914

In the Revolution the church was used as a store-house for supplies for the army, necessitating the use of a neighboring barn for services.

NOTE

The above history is taken from
"New Jersey Buildings and Bio-
graphical Sketches" collected and
edited by Mrs. Walter W. Jackson,
historian, of Rahway, New Jersey.

Revised 1936, H.C.F.